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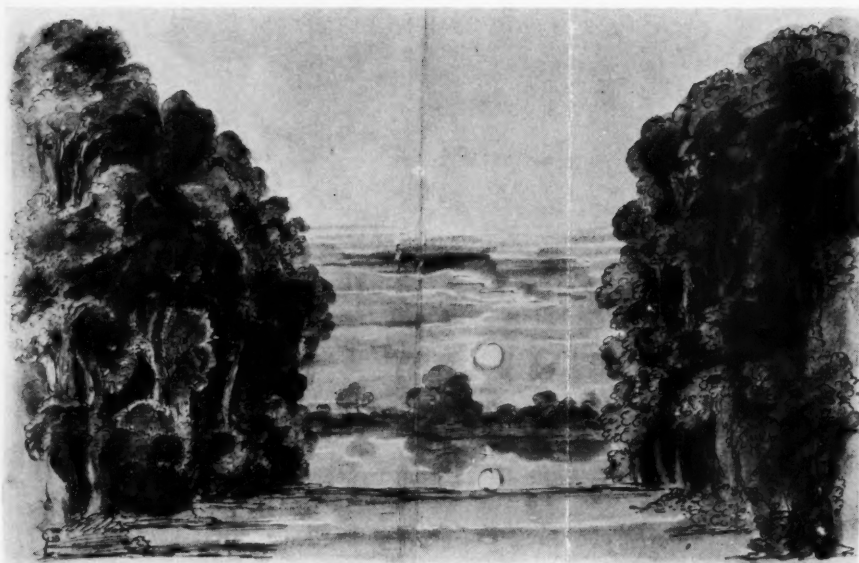
THEATRE ART

Mr. Lee Simonson of the Theatre Guild spent the summer in Europe collecting material for the Theatre Art Exhibition which opens to the public on Jan. 16th. He recounts for the Bulletin some of his experiences and reflections.

The Hon. John R. Hylan, while mayor of New York, once made a valuable contribution to the vocabulary of art criticism. He invented the term "art-artists." It has been too little used. The distinction between an art-artist and an artist is an actual one, as I began to realize afresh while collecting drawings in Europe the past few months for the International Exhibition of Theatre Art that is to open at the Museum this month. An art-artist consciously and deliberately produces a work of art that is wholly aesthetic in its appeal and is designed to arouse only a special sixth sense, the aesthetic sense, isolated by art critics during the first years of this century. His statues, without pedestals, or his pictures in gold frames, like children dressed for a party, wait to be invited out. Usually this work has no place to go until it is invited out to an exhibition. There it is appraised by a set of soothsayers known as art critics, with a supposedly highly developed aesthetic sense, who decide whether or not it is Art. Until then the



Detail of curtain painted by Picasso for "Parade," Ballets Russes, lent by les fils de Léon Helft, Paris



© The Duke of Devonshire

Setting for "Luminalia," by Inigo Jones, collection of the Duke of Devonshire

public does not quite dare to appreciate it, or to buy it. Unfortunately, until fifteen years ago the professional soothsayers proved extremely unreliable. They ridiculed, damned or ignored the work of every aesthetic innovator who was first recognized as a rule by novelists or poets such as Gautier, Zola, George Moore or Gertrude Stein, and then widely acknowledged only after he had died in poverty like van Gogh, or in obscurity like Cézanne, or was being trundled about in a wheel-chair, like Renoir in his old age. Even fellow innovators failed to recognize one another. Manet (according to Vollard) once remarked to Monet, "As a friend of Renoir you ought to advise him to give up painting. You can see for yourself how little aptitude he has for it."

The Artist as Craftsman

The artist, on the other hand, is primarily a craftsman who produces an impure form of art, known derogatively in aesthetic circles as applied decorative art, produces it because it is needed, appreciated and used, and rarely needs as an incentive the conviction that he is creating a type of art that will occupy a permanent niche in the pantheon of art history. By this process we occasionally get a building, a bridge, or a stage setting which somehow also has the quality of a work of art in that it expresses the taste, the temper and the culture of an epoch. They are so much a part of contemporary life that often they cannot be uprooted and isolated in an exhibition hall:

occasionally they are used up, worn out or actually dismantled before we realize that they may have been important landmarks in the aesthetic development of a nation or a continent. Any number of objects that are now classed as works of art in our museums were also so much a part of the life of their time that they could not have been collected when they were being produced without pulling chairs from under the worthies who were sitting on them, dismantling priests, violating tombs or desecrating altars.

Work Seldom Seen

Designs for stage settings fall in this category. The art-artists of the Paris School, such as Picasso and Derain, who worked as artists for the Ballets Russes, seem to consider their work for the theatre too unimportant to bother about. Picasso told me over the phone that his designs for the *Tricorne* were somewhere in his atelier, but that he could not take time to look for them. Besides he was very lazy. Derain declined to send any of his costume drawings; they were too unimportant. Adolphe Appia's epoch-making designs for Wagner's operas are deposited in a spare room of the library of the Musée d'Art et d'Histoire at Geneva, kept as loose sheets in a portfolio. It has never occurred to the Museum to frame them or exhibit them. Pirchan has not a single completed drawing from the expressionist productions of *Othello* and *Richard III* that made theatrical history in Berlin under Jessner. At Prague, with the aid of Hofman's wife, I had to dig out from old portfolios, drawers and cupboards, the original designs for the productions that helped to give the theatres of Prague international importance. Even the drawings of Inigo Jones for Jonson's *Masques* and Davenant's *Operas*, now among the most precious possessions of the Duke of Devonshire's collection at Chatsworth are, some of them, still splashed with flecks of scene paint just

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FUTURE EXHIBITIONS

International Exhibition of Theatre Art, January 16th to February 26th. Directed by Mr. Lee Simonson of the Theatre Guild; will include drawings and models done during the last four centuries in France, Italy, England, Germany, Sweden, Finland, Czechoslovakia, Austria, Poland, the U.S.S.R., and the United States.

GALA OPENING

On the evening of Jan. 15th, from 10:30 p.m. to 1, a Gala Opening and members' preview of the Exhibition of Theatre Art will be held at the Museum. A group of distinguished guests representing the theatre and allied arts have been invited to attend.

RADIO PROGRAM

Station WEAf (N. B. C.) and network: Program, "Women's Radio Review."

Monday, January 15, 3:30-4:00 p.m.—Lee Simonson.

Monday, January 29, 3:30-4:00 p.m.—A well-known actor will tour the Exhibition with his hearers.

Monday, February 5, 3:30-4:00 p.m.—Marc Connelly on the importance of scenery to the play.

Monday, February 12, 3:30-4:00 p.m.—Cleon Throckmorton, to talk on American Stage Designers.

Monday, February 19, 3:30-4:00 p.m.—Donald Oenslager to talk on Opera and scenic design.

Monday, February 26, 3:30-4:00 p.m.—John Mason Brown to talk on the "lost" theatre of Drottningholm.

CRITICS DISAGREE

The Exhibition of Contemporary Painting and Sculpture from Sixteen American Cities, chosen by local representatives, which opened at the Museum on Dec. 13th, was assembled to enlighten New York as well as to honor the rest of the country. Outside

New York, the press hailed the exhibition enthusiastically. The New York critics disagreed.

Edward Alden Jewell, N. Y. Times

"The Sixteen Cities show is on—fresh and enlightening in its presentation of talents, many of which are new to us. . . . About a fifth of the artists participating were born in Europe. But the melting-pot, it seems, works both ways, and a good many of the American artists who have been citizens all their lives reveal in their work a persisting acquisitive reverence for European manners and masters."

Henry McBride, N. Y. Sun.

"In the same way that the country as a whole has cut loose from the fashion centers of Europe, the outlying American provinces have cut loose from the apron strings of New York. Such places as Dallas, Seattle, Atlanta and Minneapolis have finally been made aware that we are really interested in their goings on rather than in their imitations of our goings on."

E. G., N. Y. World-Telegram.

"The exhibition proves . . . not that there is any distinctly characteristic art springing up in the different sections of the country . . . but rather that New York is not the only city in America producing art, that artists all over the country are active." . . .

Royal Cortissoz, N. Y. Herald Tribune.

". . . to be quite blunt, there is a good deal in it that looks like immature, students' work. What the sixteen cities have done has not been to disclose anything that is new or important, but to supply one more miscellany of undistinguished works with here and there a picture lifted above the average. . . ."

Margaret Breuning, N. Y. Evening Post.

"A chastening experience for the supposedly self-satisfied New Yorker to discover how much fresh, stimulating work is being produced quite outside the pale of his cultural precincts. . . . The biographical data of individual artists reveal that few of them were born and fewer still educated in art schools in the localities of their present listing. A fact which merely goes to demonstrate that there can hardly be much local differentiation in American art at the present time when habitation is so transient a matter."



Model of Setting, 1933, for "The Emperor Jones," by Cleon Throckmorton

as they came from the scene painter's workshop. They were also working drawings and evidently not considered worth preserving carefully in their day.

The single exception was the Soviet Union, where there is not only a contemporary Theatre Museum at Moscow, but where every important theatre in Lenin-grad and Moscow has its own museum where the records of all its important productions are preserved, either as models or drawings. But here the difficulty was of another sort. Many were so fixed as part of a permanent installation that they could not be pried loose.

Eleven Countries Represented

Nevertheless designs for the theatre, although not often exhibited, do manage to get themselves preserved. So this exhibition will be a comprehensive one. The National Museum of Stockholm has lent six of the earliest costume drawings known—by Primaticcio (ca. 1560) for a Renaissance masque. In addition, Dr. Beijer of the Drottningholm Theatre Museum is lending almost eighty of his unique collection of designs, including Berain and Bibiena, and the work of Desprez whose later designs in the 1790's for the Drottningholm theatre anticipate the entire trend of painted scenery until the 1870's. There will be no less than twenty-two Adolphe Appias, practically the entire body of his work, more than has ever been assembled before at a single exhibition, which the executors of his estate consented to send. Thanks to the efforts of the Moscow V.O.K.S. (the Bureau for Cultural Relations with Foreign Countries) I managed to secure a Soviet section that includes all the typical phases of Russian theatrical production, from the pre-revolutionary designs of Golovin, which were the original inspiration for the scene painting of the Ballets Russes, through many of the typical constructivist and abstract settings, to the new realism which is now general in even the theatres of the Revolution. There will be represented as well, work of the contemporary German, Viennese, Swedish, Finnish, English and French designers. M. Helft of Paris cut out of a backdrop that Picasso actually painted, two of its leading motifs and is lending them. Paul Rosenberg is lending the theatrical designs of Picasso, Derain and Braque from his private collection. Gordon Craig of course refused to send anything, but that gap is being filled by a series of original lithographs and etchings, many originally reproduced in "Scene," from the collection of Alfred Stieglitz. The leading American designers have agreed

to do a new project free from any limitations that Broadway might impose.

Living Art

Altogether, with unavoidable gaps and omissions, the exhibition will provide as complete a survey of the development of scenic design from its beginnings in the 16th century through all the schools of today as has perhaps ever been assembled. It is possibly true, as Roller remarked to me in Vienna, that the design of a stage setting can be exhibited only in the theatre. A design, of course, cannot be realized except on the stage as part of the life of a performance of which it is (or should be) an inextricable part. Nevertheless, theatre-goers and theatre-lovers should be able, at this exhibition, to get a fresh sense of the irrepressible life of the theatre, of the successive conventions which in their day were living art in that they have made life on the stage more real, and often more vital, than "real life" could ever be.

LEE SIMONSON.

ARCHITECTURE ROOM

An exhibition of large photographs of the Philadelphia Savings Fund Society Building in Philadelphia, designed by Howe and Lescaze is being held in the Architecture Room until January 23rd. A typical office unit—desk, chairs and so forth—designed by the same architects for the building, is also included in the exhibit.

FILM COMMENTS

LITTLE WOMEN (Directed by George Cukor)

Alas for Louisa Alcott! Her little women, transplanted to a Newport mansion; and splendidly attired, have gone completely Hollywood! The sweetness has been preserved but, without genuine piety and austerity to balance it, becomes suffocating. Only at moments does the authentic flavor or real human feeling creep in—once or twice, thanks to Katharine Hepburn's performance, and notably when Paul Lukas as Professor Bhaer sings at a cracked piano to governess Jo.

ESKIMO (Directed by W. S. Van Dyke)

This new version of the triangular situation, enacted by natives of singular charm and expressiveness, is crammed with spectacle and drama: it rivals "Chang" and "Moana" in pictorial splendor.

THE INVISIBLE MAN (Directed by James Whale)

A brilliant choice of subject, brilliantly executed by Claude Rains as the omnipresent though unseen hero, by technical magicians who enable us to see his footprints, his cigarette smoke, and by the director who gives us startling peeps into his crazed mind.

—IRIS BARRY.

